

“The Big Fish” *P.Duke. 1984.7*

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The three columns of text written in trochaic tetrameters on the *recto* of *P.Duke. 1984.7* feature the anonymous comic fragment 1146 VIII K.-A, known as *Comoedia Dukiana*.

The scene is framed in a culinary context and consists of a dialogue between two characters: in vv. 1-5 the main speaker praises the qualities of a Nilotic fish called *silouros*,¹ which is said to be *κοίρανον*, *ἡγεμόνα*, *μόναρχον* and *ἀρχόν* the prince of fish, their leader, their monarch, their commander. Following this celebratory description, the second speaker encourages his interlocutor in pronouncing an *encomium* to the *silouros*. Therefore, what follows in verses 7-16 is such a real praise that the second speaker says in vv. 17-18: ‘Not even Isocrates has ever delivered such a tribute to Helena as you did to your *silouros*!’. As if he wanted to curb his enthusiasm, the main speaker warns the second one that the *silouros* is a highly exclusive fish and that ‘not for every man is sailing to the *silouros*’ (v. 20), clearly mocking the famous proverb *οὐ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐς Κόρινθον ἔσθ’ ὁ πλοῦς*.² Then, a series of bizarre instructions on how to cook and serve the outstanding fish follows (vv. 21-50).

The *editio princeps* includes a papyrological introduction, translation, and commentary, published by William Willis (1992). Proposing a dating of the fragment, Willis considers the allusion to Isocrates’ *Helena* in verse 17 as a *terminus a quo*³ at least. However, he admits that a reference to the work by Isocrates could have been made even at a long interval of time since the work itself was composed. The *editor princeps* signals the proposal informally suggested by Colin Austin,⁴ attributing the comic fragment to the Middle Comedy poet Cratinus Junior, citing Cratinus’ fr. 336 IV K-A⁵ *γλαῦκον οὐ παντὸς <ἀνδρὸς> ἔστιν ἀρτυῖσαι καλῶς*,⁶ a fragment which, according to Austin, would find its place immediately before the first verses recorded on the papyrus. However, according to Willis, the ichthyic theme of the text recorded on *P.Duke. 1984.7* easily suggests that the fragment is to be linked to the fragmented play *Ichthyes*⁷ by Archippus. *Ichthyes* is a comedy featuring some kind of upside-down world,

¹ See Thompson (1947) 233-234.

² Not for every man is the navigation to Corinth. Cf. Hesych. ο 1806 L.; Ar. fr. dub. 928 K.-A.

³ Willis (1992) 334.

⁴ C. Austin *ap.* Willis (1992) 336.

⁵ The fragment is collected under the fragments *incertae fabulae* ascribed to the elder Cratinus but Kassel suggested that the line could be attributed to ‘*iunioris Cratini*’, *PCG* IV.285.

⁶ Not every man can do a good job seasoning *glaukos*.

⁷ Of the *Ichthyes* we have about twenty fragments, most of them preserved in Book VII of the *Deipnosophistai*. Archippus’ comedy is dated to 401-400 B.C. and displays a community of anthropomorphized fish that, tired of the abuses perpetrated by the human beings, engages a quarrel with them. The conflict is then resolved with a peace treaty between the fish and the Athenians, according to Athenaeus *Deipn.*7.329 quoting Archippus.

perhaps along the lines of *Birds* by Aristophanes.⁸ One of the most significant comic gimmicks in the *Ichthyes* is the anthropomorphosis of fish, according to which the names of fish species are comically linked to their function within the sea society: βόαξ is a herald, σάλπηξ a trumpeter, and ὄρφος a priest.

Thanks to Athenaeus, we also know that the play *Ichthyes* mocked (κωμωδεῖν) the Athenian comic poet Melanthius for being a known glutton, ἐπι ὀψοφαγία.⁹

Kassel and Austin sharply argued that the fragment could be by an Alexandrian poet:¹⁰ the featured fish belongs to a Nilotic species; moreover, there are references to a minister διοικητής in v. 38, and to Isis and Harpocrates in vv. 39 and 44; v. 15 features the non-classical perfect form ἐντέτευχα. These would all be hints placing the fragment in a Hellenistic context. Recently, Ian C. Storey tried to demonstrate, not without difficulty, that the factors taken into account by Kassel and Austin are not decisive in attributing the fragment to a Hellenistic poet but he admits that the mention of 'the Horus-child is a real stumbling block'.¹¹

Eric Csapo (1994) supports the identification of the *Comoedia Dukiana* as part of Archippus' *Ichthyes*, arguing that 'considerations of date and theme alone suffice to make Archippus' *Ichthyes* an obvious candidate for the source of the *Comoedia Dukiana*'.¹² Furthermore, 'It takes little imagination to find a place for a dialogue about the sensual and gustatory excellences of an anthropomorphized fish in the context of Archippus' plot'.¹³ To support his argument, Csapo puts in relation some passages of the *Comoedia Dukiana* with the surviving fragments of Archippus' *Ichthyes*. Moreover, he thinks that the main speaker of *Comoedia Dukiana* 'indulges in the dithyrambicizing speech patterns characteristic of Attic comedy in the first half of the fourth century B.C'.¹⁴ Hinging on this, Csapo suggests that this characteristic is well-suited to a speech delivered by a character who we have reason to believe made an appearance in *Ichthyes*: the tragic poet Melanthius.

However, in my opinion, the elements discussed by Eric Csapo do not suffice to establish an exclusive relationship between *Comoedia Dukiana* and Archippus' *Ichthyes*. First of all, the culinary theme, recipes and especially the act of consuming fish are all recurring elements in various comedies.¹⁵ Both anthropomorphizing animals and choirs of animals can be traced in many examples of comic production at least until 410-400 B.C. It is also likely that, if a comedy brings to the stage a chorus of edible animals, they are neither cooked nor eaten, if only because the consumption of anthropomorphic animals could potentially break a taboo.¹⁶

⁸ About the relation between Archippus' *Fish* and Aristophanes' *Birds* see e.g. Kaibel (1889) 42-50; Farioli (2001) 156-174.

⁹ Athen, *Deipn.* 3.343 C.

¹⁰ *PGC* VIII, 477.

¹¹ Storey (2012), 11.

¹² Csapo (1994), 40.

¹³ Csapo (1994), 41.

¹⁴ Csapo (1994), 39.

¹⁵ Cf. Wilkins (2000) 293-304.

¹⁶ 'It is possible that a few fish were listed in Archippus, but much more likely that a number were cited in one form or another but that the eating of fish was largely suppressed, as is the eating of birds in *Birds*.' Wilkins (2000) 325. Cf. Rothwell (2006) 123.

I think we should also stress that the process of anthropomorphism involving *silouros* fish is not the same adopted for the characters in Archippus' *Ichthyas*: the name *silouros* is not a speaking name and his anthropomorphizing is functional and limited to the comic composition of an *encomium*. Furthermore, a parallelism Csapo found more compelling and that would seem to suggest a similar scenic backdrop is one he draws between the following two passages, namely *Comoedia Dukiana* vv. 1-2:

B: τί σὺ λέγεις; γλαῦκον κύλουρου κρείττον εἶναι νενόμικας;

A: τῶν μὲν οὖν ὅλως ἀπάντων ἰχθύων σοφώτατον
φημι τὸν κύλουρον εἶναι

B: What do you say? Are you convinced that the shark is better than the Sheat?

A: Of absolutely all fish, to be sure, I declare that the Sheat is wisest.

and Archippus' *Ichthyas* 15 K.-A.:

A: τί λέγεις σύ; μάντεις εἰσὶ γὰρ θαλάττιοι;

B: γαλεοὶ γε, πάντων μάντεων σοφώτατοι.

B: What do you say? Are there maritime diviners?

A: Well, among the diviners the dog-fish are the wisest!

One may argue that the resemblance is merely superficial. The differences in meter and context are crucial: the papyrus features a sequence in trochaic tetrameters where speaker B asked speaker A if the fish called *silouros* is really better than others. The adjective 'better' κρείττον is meant as 'better food', and, as can be deduced from reading the whole scene, this implies a superiority in terms of taste or delicacy. On the contrary, in Archippus' fragment, dialogue is in iambic trimeters and speaker A asks speaker B whether there really are soothsayer fish among marine creatures,¹⁷ opening a completely different scenario.

As for the para-dithyrambic articulation read by Csapo, I think some further consideration may be made. Some passages of the text in *P.Duke*. 1984.7 may apparently look like they are linked to a parody of the dithyrambic style, characterized by *hapax legomena*, extravagant new compounds, dark and circumlocutory phraseology, rarities and epic *iuncturae*: vv. 15-16 πετηρικοῦ ε καγανικοῦ both feature comic coinages of place names; v. 22 Κύλουρόθραξι and v. 30 λευκομηρίδος both feature compound adjectives of new coinage; at v. 37 Νηρέως τε κύμα πηγόν κάπὸ κρήνης μέλαν ὕδωρ the comic poet combines and revises some passages by Homer, ε 388, ψ 235 and Π 160f; also circumlocutory expressions in v. 24 πλωνεῖς (...) λεπτοῖς ἁλῶν ἀρθύμασι 'with fine ornaments of salt / of the sea' and in vv. 25-26 λεπτά σολῆνος περιζών αἵματος μελαγχίμου / πεντενίκου πεντεκρήνες πεντεπακτωτοῖς ῥοαῖς 'fledging it with fine blades of a dark-blooded razorfish in the five(times)-damned streams of a five(fold)-fountain five(times) victorious' seem to recall the above-mentioned parody, although they feature

¹⁷ Kaibel explains the scene as 'quaerit homo Atheniensis ad Pisces legatus missus'. Cf. K.-A. Arch. fr. 15.

more muted tones than the direct or indirect parodies of dithyrambic poets found in Aristophanic comedy or in Middle Comedy¹⁸.

The speech by the character in *Comoedia Dukiana* is characterized by a certain verbosity, but it also draws a parallelism between the preparation of the dish and a sort of initiation ritual: those who want to enjoy the delicious fish should be initiated (μνηθῆναι) into the mysteries of the *Silouothracia* children *Κιλουρόθραιζὶ παιδί* (here clearly a pun on the mysteries of Samothrace) and learn how to cook it properly. Vv. 25-26: it is said that the initiate table companion should wash with ‘the fine ornaments of the sea’, as prescribed *καταλαβεῖν σε δεῖ τὴν πλύσιν (...) καὶ πλυνεῖς, ὡς ἡ γραφή, λεπτοῖς ἄλῶν ἀθύρμασι*. If we are to interpret the words merely on the basis of a para-dithyrambic *lexis*, the meaning would be ‘wash it with salt, add salt!’. However, on a mystical level, the reference to a salt ablution would seem to be a pun on the command ‘ἄλαδε μύσται’ given by the hierophant when, during the second day of the celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries, the initiates had to reach the sea and undergo a purifying ritual bath.¹⁹

A reference to the mysteries of Eleusis would seem to contradict the comic allusion to the mysteries of Samothrace at v. 22, but the awkward mingling of cults could help to create the ridiculous image of the cook-initiate within the mysteries. Vv. 25-26 *λεπτὰ σωλήνος περιζών ἄματος μελαγχίμου / πεντενίκου πεντεκρήνες πεντεπακτωτοῖς ῥοαῖς*²⁰ both the anaphoric repetition of the prefix *πεντε-*, and the mention of a spring *κρήνη* and current *ῥοαῖς* seems to indicate some sort of ritual language.²¹ In v. 39, the main speaker recommends pouring something (maybe oil?) drawn from the vessel of the ‘cowfaced girl’ *παρθένου ταυρώπις*, who, according to Willis, is to be identified with Isis, since *ταυρώπις* is an epithet of Isis in Samothrace.²² The speech ends saying that, once the dish is ready, the table companion will do as Harpocrates, who ‘licks his finger’ *θηλάσας τὸν δάκτυλον*, v. 44. The act of finger-licking or eating ‘even your fingers’ is an expression recurring in many comedies.²³ It indicates appreciation for food but, given the mystical allure of the speech, the reference to Harpocrates might have another meaning: while it is true that before Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 378 b-c²⁴, Harpocrates pictured as *ori digitum admovente* is not attested as a figure warning silence and imposing *reticentia mystica*.²⁵ I do not think one should necessarily rule out that the author of the comic

¹⁸ Ar.Av.1372-1409; an example of direct and indirect parody of a dithyrambic poet set up in a culinary context are Antiphanes’ fragments 180 and 55 K.-A., where Antiphanes mocks the dithyrambic poet Philoxenos, re-using his words in a comic manner creating a paradithyrambic speech. See Sommerstein (1987) 289-291; Nesselrath (1990) 254; Ieranó (1997) 297-303; Le Van (2012) 55-59.

¹⁹ See Mylonas (1961) 249f.; Hesych. α 2727 L. ἄλαδε μύσται ἡμέρα τις τῶν Ἀθήνησι μυστηρίων.

²⁰ ‘Fledging it with fine blades of dark-blooded razorfish in the five(times)-damned streams of a five(fold)-fountain five(times) victorious.’

²¹ For anaphoric repetitions, see e.g. *Orph.* Kern F 21a and 168; for the spring see e.g. *Orph.* Kern F 32a,b;

²² Cf. Willis (1992) 351; *P.Oxy.* XI 1380.107, l. 107.

²³ Cf. e.g. Alexis 172 K.-A., 1-6; Aristoph. 9 K.-A. 8-10

²⁴ Cf. *ad loc.* K.-A. ‘*nulla hic significatio silentii ab infante divino praescripti, quae posterior illius gestus interpretatio fuit*’.

²⁵ Cf. e.g. De Montefaucon (1722) 300-305.

fragment associated Harpocrates' gesture with a call for silence, to which all initiated into the mysteries must submit. If that were the case, the parallelism developed throughout the speech would close with an image comically allusive both to the great taste of the dish and to the sphere of mystery cults.

It is for this reason that I believe the language and the overall attitude of the main speaker — rather than leading us to identify him with a precise dithyrambic or tragic poet — may be referred to the stock-character features of the cook μάγειρος both in Middle and in New Comedy. He embodies the conjunction between the comic art of cooking and pompous rhetoric. As noted by Nesselrath, in Middle Comedy the cook enters the stage not only as a food expert but also as “Sprachzauberer”,²⁶ who usually performs long speeches adopting a dithyrambic *modus dicendi*. Long-winded speeches by cooks persist in New Comedy as well, but ‘keiner von ihnen dithyrambisiert’.²⁷ The role and the language of the cook character undergo a change in the transition from Middle to New Comedy, where we see him both acting as a *virtuoso* and exalting himself and his ἀλαζονεία, that ‘äußerte sich nun verstärkt in dem Versuch, die Kochkunst nachgerade zu einer hellenistischen Über-Wissenschaft zu stilisieren, die zwischen ihren Töpfen und Pfannen noch alle möglichen anderen Fachgebiete unterbringen will’.²⁸ In our case, the cook proposes himself not only as an expert in the preparation of *silouros*, but also as a *mystagōgos*, since his speech looks like a comic *hieros logos*, putting together a sequence of elaborate instructions addressed to his interlocutor.

The presence of such a stock-character of the cook μάγειρος and, most of all, the occurrence of the evolved perfect verbal form ἐντέτευχα lead us to contextualise the fragment as a product of New Comedy of the Hellenistic period. The coloring of the fragment, which appears *prima facie* Egyptian, might suggest a poet familiar with the Egyptian environment as the author of the fragment. Nevertheless, I think that those elements placed in the mouth of the cook character reveal more about the characterization of the character itself, rather than about the author of the comedy. A foreign, i.e. non-Greek, appearance is attested in a few characters in New Comedy, including the cook, as evidenced by some masks representing a dark-skinned cook.²⁹ Both the predilection for a variety of Nile fish, the *silouros*, and all references to Egyptian culture may have been staged to give an ethnic characterization to the character.

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²⁶ Nesselrath (1990) 257.

²⁷ Nesselrath (1990) 257.

²⁸ Nesselrath (1990) 307. See also Wilkins (2000) 380-82; Dobrov (2002) 186-90.

²⁹ Cf. Wiles (1991), 168; *MNC*³ vol. II, 6DM 2.2.

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